

U.S. Naval Air Station,  
The Brig (Building 8)  
Pensacola  
Escambia County  
Florida

HABS No. FL-243

HABS  
FLA  
17-PENSA,  
64-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. NAVAL AIR STATION,  
THE BRIG (Building 8)

HABS No. FL-243

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FLA  
17-PENSH  
64-

Location: U.S. Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Escambia  
County, Florida.

Present Owner: Commanding Officer.

Present Use: Correctional Center.

Significance: Built in 1908, the small building with a  
corbeled brick cornice served as a prison until  
circa 1964. It is now a minimum security  
correctional center.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1908.
2. Architect: The building was probably designed by one of the Washington architects employed by the U.S. Navy.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Brig (Building 8) was built on the old Pensacola Navy Yard and it has been the property of the U.S. Navy during its entire history.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Construction of the building was completed by craftsmen and laborers of the Navy Yard under the supervision of the Civil Engineer.
5. Original plans and construction: There apparently was no brig on the old Navy Yard prior to the Civil War. In the Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy in 1853, he advised "There being no receiving-ship at this yard, great inconvenience is experienced from the want of a proper place for the security and safe confinement of persons charged with crimes or under sentence of courts-martial. To remedy this difficulty, it is proposed to erect a suitable guard-house, where such unruly and troublesome persons may be kept separate from the orderly and well disposed." In what manner and where such persons were confined prior to this date is unknown.

There is some question about the use of the word "guard-house" in the Secretary's report because a structure, Building 32 at the West Gate, was completed on the Navy Yard in 1853. That building was used by the Marine guard and did not double as a prison or brig as was later the case. Thus, a guard-house actually existed on the Navy Yard in 1853, but no prison or brig. In order to provide temporary confinement facilities until a prison could be erected, a room in the Paint Shop, Building 33, was fitted up as a prison room. During the Civil War both the Paint Shop and the Guard House were destroyed.

Following the war, in 1868, a combination guard house and prison, Building 16, was constructed on the south side of and adjacent to the old West Gate, the current site of the Brig. A floor plan of the building, which is at the National Archives, Washington, was made about 1870. Half of the building was used by the Marine guard and the other half for the confinement of prisoners. The building continued to be used for that purpose until after the turn of the century when plans were being made to replace it.

In 1904 a drawing was made of a proposed prison. The following year, 1905, it was reported that the accommodations of prisoners were inadequate and unsanitary. In 1906, the criticisms were repeated and it was recommended that an appropriation of \$28,000 be made for a new structure. "A moderate-sized building with proper fittings is practically a necessity and is very strongly urged by the Judge-Advocate-General."

In September, 1906, a hurricane swept across the Pensacola area. A contemporary report called it the greatest and most disastrous storm in history. Damage at the Navy Yard was estimated to be millions of dollars. "Every vessel at the yard is either sunk or high and dry on the beach, all of the buildings are more or less damaged." As a result, the building, referred to as the prison, Building 8, was so badly damaged that "it was torn down and rebuilt with concrete foundations and floor, brick walls, tile roof, etc." The present building was built in 1908.

6. Alterations and additions: The first references to any extensive remodeling of the Brig are a set of plans dated 1941. Although the plans do not indicate specifically what remodeling was done, it is obvious that considerable renovation was accomplished. The work included plumbing, heating, electrical and structural changes and improvements.

No substantial amount of work has been necessary since 1941, although the building has been repainted and has otherwise been well maintained. In 1942 it was necessary to improve the ventilation. In 1948, drainage problems were corrected and in 1972 the storm drain and catch basin were added and connected to the station drainage system. The only other major change recorded came in 1965 when a new fire alerting system was installed at a cost of \$400.

- B. Historical Context: Records are not available to indicate whether any notorious criminals had ever been confined in the Brig nor was there any evidence of jail breaks or comparable incidents beyond the ordinary confinement of prisoners. Since at least 1964, the Brig has been used to house prisoners in the restricted category. The prisoners are under minimum physical security restrictions.

Prepared by:

Dr. William S. Coker  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
Summer 1972

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Built in 1908 as a prison, this small, simple brick structure has a corbeled brick cornice as its only ornamentation.
2. Condition of fabric: The structure, well-maintained, is in excellent condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building, rectangular in plan and one-story high, is 31'-6" x 92'-9".
2. Foundations: The 12" thick foundation wall rests on a concrete slab, 10" thick and 2'-0" wide.

3. Walls: The walls, 9" in thickness, are common bond brick, painted a cream color, with the header course every fourth course.
4. Structural system, framing: The exterior brick bearing walls support the ceiling joists which are inaccessible.
5. Stoop: A small, two-step concrete stoop, 4'-6" x 7'-0", approximately 24" above grade, provides access to the entrance on the north facade.
6. Chimneys: None.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance door on the north facade has a glass panel over a panel with a louvered inset. A screen door also exists on this opening. On the west side of the building a metal covered door provides access to the transformer vault. On the south facade a 2'-6" x 5'-0" steel door opens to the toilet area.
  - b. Windows: Typically, the windows in the cell block area are three-over-three detention type cell sash with outside wire mesh painted brown. Some six-over-three steel sash also exist in the cellblock area. Windows in the lounge and reception room are six-over-six wooden sash with glazing being 9" x 13". Concrete sills exist on all windows.
8. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: The hip roof is covered with asphalt shingles and contains four roof vents along the ridge line. Another vent, a blower vent, sits on the east roof.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: A plain cornice exists over the exposed rafters that make up a 2' overhang. Beneath the eaves is a three-course dentil, continuous around the building.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: South of the reception room, just inside from the main entrance, is a small hallway containing two small gear closets. From this hallway to the west is a lounge room. East

of the lounge and also off the hallway is a lavatory with a shower. East of the reception room is the cellblock containing three solitary confinement cells and three rows of detention cells, nine to a row. An inspection corridor is in front of each row of cells. East of this group of cells is another corridor with an opening that leads to a washroom with five wash basins. South of the washroom is a room containing toilets and urinals. North of the wash basin area is a shower room.

2. Flooring: Flooring in the detention cell area is concrete, while the floors in the reception room and lounge room are vinyl tile. Ceramic tile covers the floor in the toilet off the reception room.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings in the reception room and lounge room are plastered and painted a pea green. Interior walls in the detention area are common bond brick with the header course every sixth course. Ceilings are 4" board and 3'-8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " below is a bar grating consisting of 1" bars spaced 4" on center. Walls in the wash basin area and shower room are also brick, but are covered with stucco to the height of the lintel opening. Ceilings are narrow board.
4. Doorways and doors: Interior doors in the reception room, toilet room and lounge room are two-panel doors, while the door leading to the detention area is heavy  $\frac{3}{4}$ " steel plate with heavy sliding steel bolt latches.
5. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Cast-iron steam radiators are supplied from the Navy's main steam plant.
  - b. Lighting: The lighting is modern flourescent and incandescent.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The long axis of the structure is oriented east and west with the main entrance to the building on the north facade. East of the building is West Avenue and west of the building is a parking lot. South of the brig is an airplane hangar now used as a gymnasium.

2. Historic landscape design: A 7' concrete sidewalk to<sup>f</sup> the main entrance goes by the old guard house from South Avenue. A narrow 2' walk continues from the main walk around to the west side of the brig. A ligustrum hedge and a yew line the north side of the brig. The remaining portion of the area is planted with grass. A well and a steam junction box are located west and south of the building respectively.

Prepared by:

John A. Sanderson  
University of Florida  
Project Supervisor  
July-August 1972

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Original Architectural Drawings and other records:

Measured drawings, floor plans and index cards indicating architectural, mechanical, electrical and general work on the Brig in Engineering Department, Public Works Center, NAS, Pensacola, Florida. Records are basically World War I to present.

Measured drawings, floor plans, Navy Yard maps in Bureau of Yards and Docks Plan Files, Navy Department, on microfilm, copy in Old Military Records Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Index (16 mm.) see last part of Reel 13 and first part of Reel 14. Drawings, etc., of Pensacola Navy Yard are numbered 800-1-1 to 800-45-407, Reels 641 through 648.5 (35 mm.). Records date from about 1829 to end of World War II.

Renovation drawings, dated July 11, 1941, stored at Public Works Center, Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida., also available in HABS Field Records.

- B. Early views: An aerial view taken on August 1, 1919, shows the west one-third of the building in its World War I camouflage suit. This view is on file at the Naval Aviation Museum, Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. Negative # 010011.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building Property Records, Plant Account Office, Public Works Center, Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Pensacola Journal, September 28, p. 2; 29, 1906, p. 5.

U.S. Navy. Annual Reports of the Navy Department.  
Washington, 1848-

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) under joint sponsorship of the National Park Service, The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Florida, and the Historic Pensacola Preservation Board. Measured and drawn during the summer of 1972 under the direction of John Poppeliers, chief of HABS, by: Rodd L. Wheaton (Architect, HABS), June Project Supervisor; John A. Sanderson (University of Florida), July-August Project Supervisor; Dr. William S. Coker (University of West Florida), Historian; John M. Szubski (Princeton University), Architect; and by Student Assistant Architects: J. Tucker Bishop (University of Texas, Austin); John C. Hecker (University of Illinois, Urbana) and Scott A. Kinzy (University of Nebraska) at the United States Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written descriptive and architectural data in the fall of 1980. Jack Boucher, a HABS staff photographer, took the documentary photographs in March of 1974.



ADDENDUM TO:  
U.S. NAVAL AIR STATION, BRIG  
(Building No. 8)  
South Avenue  
Pensacola  
Escambia County  
Florida

HABS FL-243  
*FLA, 17-PENSA, 64-*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001